

USDA Forest Service – Cherokee National Forest
Benton Falls Bear Incident
Incident Update - June 16, 2006

The Incident: On Thursday, April 13th at approximately 3:30 PM EST, a black bear attack took place near Benton Falls in the Cherokee National Forest. A 45-year old Ohio woman, and her two-year old son, were injured in the attack. Her six-year old daughter died in the attack.

Shortly after the attack was reported the USDA Forest Service closed the area to public use. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) coordinated a search for the bear with dogs. When this effort proved unsuccessful culvert traps were placed in the area, one close to the site of the attack and several others in a one and a half mile area surrounding it. As a result of the trapping operation two black bears were captured near the attack site. The first animal was captured Sunday, April 16th and the second was captured Monday April 17th.

Testing: The first animal captured was euthanized by TWRA and taken to the University of Tennessee Veterinary Teaching Clinic in Knoxville, Tennessee where a necropsy was performed. The results of this procedure did not provide any immediate evidence that the bear was involved in the attack. Samples and other evidence were gathered and evaluated by appropriate testing facilities for further forensic analysis.

When the first animal was captured wildlife officials believed that there was a chance that some of the direct evidence from the attack may still be found. The nature of these invasive tests was such that the animal had to be euthanized to perform them. When the second animal was captured it was believed that the time frame was outside the period where direct evidence of the attack would be found and the invasive tests would not yield any useful results. This animal was transported by TWRA alive to a holding area where a variety of tests were conducted.

Test Results: The samples gathered from both bears were subjected to a variety of testing procedures designed to search for any human related evidence. Investigating authorities have learned from the FBI laboratory that the controlled samples gathered from under the front claws of the second bear captured tested positive for human DNA.

It is the policy of the TWRA to destroy any native wild black bear proven to be involved in the attack of a human. The second bear was removed from its holding area, euthanized by wildlife officials and retained for future necropsy. Wildlife officials are confident that the animal responsible of this tragedy has been eliminated from the wild bear population of the Cherokee National Forest.

Recreation Area Closure: Based on the findings of the final evidence reports, the areas in and adjacent to Chilhowee Mountain that have been closed were reopened at 9:00 AM, EST Friday, June 16, 2006. This includes Chilhowee Recreation Area and the Parksville Campground, as well as roads and trails leading to the area. For additional information please call 423-338-3300.”